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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000346

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP, DRL

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TAGS: [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SA](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: JEDDAH-BASED SAUDI HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST, ONE OF  
NEW FEMALE ADVISORS TO MAJLIS AL-SHURA, PLANS TO PROPOSE  
LEGISLATION TO PROTECT DIVORCED WOMEN AND ABUSED CHILDREN

REF: A. 09 RIYADH 598

[1](#)B. 09 JEDDAH 070

[1](#)C. 06 JEDDAH 446

JEDDAH 00000346 001.2 OF 002

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Jawhara Al-Angari, co-founder of the non-governmental National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) and one of the women recently appointed advisors to the all-male Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council), said that she planned to propose legislation to protect divorced women, and requested examples of US law as models. She also asked for help financing the NSHR's media campaign against child abuse and examples of American laws requiring police, teachers, and doctors to report suspected instances of child abuse. Noting that the NSHR depends on royal decrees to authorize its work, Al-Angari explained that NSHR assists individuals who seek its help. She criticized women's rights activists at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) for ignoring casework and focusing on changing Saudi laws. END SUMMARY.

Female advisor to all-male Shura Council  
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[1](#)2. (C) In an August 14 meeting at the NSHR's Jeddah office, Jawhara Al-Angari volunteered that she was going to be appointed to the 150-member Majlis Al-Shura (ref A). A handful of women serve as part-time, non-voting advisors to the all-male Consultative Council, focusing primarily on women's issues. Once appointed, Al-Angari told us she planned to propose legislation guaranteeing the rights of divorced women to the council, and requested that post provide her with texts of US laws that protect divorcees. A September 14 article in Al-Riyadh newspaper reported that Al-Angari -- as well as 9 other women -- had been appointed advisors to the council, and the number of female advisors might reach 12 (the number originally announced by the King in February, up from 6 in the previous session). The article claimed that these female advisors would have the same role as male members of the council, except for being able to vote, and asserted that the mandates of the female advisors had been expanded to include representing the Kingdom at international women's meetings and meeting visiting women's delegations. According to the article, the female advisors are: Jawhara Al-Angari, Asya Al Ashaikh (who confirmed her appointment on her company website), Maha Al-Menif, May Al-Aisa, Nora Al Ashaikh, Fatma Jamjoom, Jawhara Bubsheet, Mhasn Felemban, Nora Alasqh, Alham Hsain.

Seeking US help to aid abused Saudi children

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¶3. (C) Al-Angari requested USG help financing the NSHR's new media campaign against child abuse (ref B), but agreed that approaching companies that sell children's products might be an option. According to Al-Angari, the NSHR aims to have Saudis acknowledge the problem of child abuse, and enact a law requiring educators, doctors, and police officers to report suspected cases, as in the United States. She asked for examples of instructions given to US professionals about identifying and reporting child abuse. NSHR staff are now translating this information, which post forwarded from the federal Child Welfare Information Gateway website. Al-Angari added that the NSHR plans to push for legislation requiring abusive parents or spouses to move out of the family home, complaining that currently abuse victims must move out of their houses and often wind up returning to their abusers because they have nowhere else to go.

Aiding individuals through the system  
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¶4. (C) The NSHR monitors deviations from human rights agreements that the Saudi government has signed and suggests legal reforms to Saudi officials. The NSHR also advises individuals who approach the organization for help, guiding clients if they don't know what to do, often with the help of volunteer lawyers. After accepting a case, the NSHR writes to the appropriate government minister, and if there is no answer within two weeks, NSHR petitions the king. The NSHR has solved 70 percent of the 30,000 cases it has handled, Al-Angari stated proudly. Asked if the organization would be willing to assist foreign workers or Saudi Shia, Al-Angari claimed that the NSHR does not discriminate in accepting

JEDDAH 00000346 002.2 OF 002

cases. The NSHR has assisted many foreigners, women, and children -- including child brides -- and visited many prisons. The only case involving a Shia that she could recall in the Jeddah district involved the NSHR assisting a Sunni woman to obtain a divorce from a Shia man who hid his religion from her before marriage. Al-Angari had sharp words for foreign consulates that do not pay, or provide air tickets, to repatriate their citizens, leaving workers stranded in the Kingdom. She also criticized the JCCI for focusing on changing laws and regulations rather than aiding individuals with particular cases.

Continued improvements?  
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¶5. (C) COMMENT: Al-Angari seemed committed to working through the existing system. She emphasized that the NSHR has depended upon decrees from the late King Fahd and current King Abdullah to authorize its activities, and stressed that she is fighting for rights guaranteed to women by Islam. Contacts disagreed about the significance of appointing these women, with critics noting their limited role and others complaining that these wealthy and well-connected women are out of touch with the needs of typical Saudi women. Looking to a possible future in which women were appointed full members of the Majlis Al-Shura, women's rights activist Basmah Omair (ref C) of the JCCI said her experience at the Chamber with a handful of female board members had confirmed the findings of a Harvard Study that it takes at least three female board members pushing for women's rights to make a difference. Post will continue to engage with Ms. Al-Angari.

END COMMENT.

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